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ABSTRACT

This monograph provides special educators with guidelines to help them succeed in their work with minority language students. It emphasizes the necessity for bringing the social context into educational planning, in its discussion of such topics as the history of limited English proficient (LEP) children in special education, classroom needs of LEP handicapped children, methods of working with minority language parents, and issues in the assessment of LEP children. An introductory chapter discusses the diversity among LEP children and the achievement of LEP children in schools. An historical perspective on minority language students and special education focuses on the growth of ungraded classes for "backward" children between 1900 and 1920, the rise of intelligence tests and their use on LEP children, overrepresentation of minority children in special education, and current efforts toward change. Classroom needs call for consideration of assimilationism versus pluralism, teacher attitudes, cross-cultural communication, motivation, multicultural curriculum, and teaching English as a second language. Assessment of minority language students requires standardized testing as well as nonstandardized measures of language proficiency in both the child's first and second languages, measures of adaptive behavior, and naturalistic observations of the child in various settings. (JDD)

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A GUIDE TO WORKING WITH MINORITY LANGUAGE STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Prepared for the Superintendent
of Public Instruction

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FOREWORD

The handicapped student who also comes from a home background where English is not the primary language--who speaks English poorly or not at all--presents an acute problem requiring highly specialized attention from school staff whose responsibility it is to provide assistance. Unfortunately, Bilingual Education and Special Education have developed along separate lines with relatively few cross-overs. It is rare to find staff persons in either field who have knowledge of the other. Some areas are especially difficult, such as assessment, when the child does not speak English.

During 1981-82 a great deal of attention was focused on the needs of handicapped bilingual children through a variety of projects and conferences. The present monograph was one such project and is intended to provide guidance and information to those who work with minority language students in Special Education. The author, Steven Gelb, is a graduate student at the University of Washington. His background of experience covers both Special Education and Bilingual Education. It is our sincere hope that this monograph will be useful to teachers and administrators who must find ways to deal with bilingual students who also have special needs.

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I. INTRODUCTION: THE EXCEPTIONAL MINORITY LANGUAGE CHILD

There is no student whose educational needs are more urgent than the handicapped child who is limited English proficient (LEP).[1] Exceptional LEP children are in double jeopardy - in addition to the difficulties posed by their handicapping condition, they face obstacles which spring from membership in a minority group and from their limited command of English.

Being handicapped and belonging to an ethnic minority group have certain similarities. Both groups have been subject to stigmatization by the nonhandicapped majority. The stigmatized person is seen stereotypically by others and may be discounted in their minds as less than fully human. The exceptional minority child may be subjected to a double set of prejudicial attitudes; for example, the blind Mexican American child faces negative stereotypes which the sighted often have towards the blind in addition to those which Anglos may have towards Chicanos.

Another parellel between ethnic minorities and the handicapped is historical: both groups were victims of educational discrimination. For many years large numbers of handicapped children were excluded from attending school completely. Language minority groups and some ethnic groups were educated without consideration for their language needs and were assessed and placed on the basis of tests given to them in a language they had not mastered. In areas in which large numbers of minority language children lived, they often attended segregated and inferior schools. The Education for all Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142, was designed to protect the rights of the handicapped by insuring them an appropriate education at public expense in the least restrictive environment, and the rights of minorities by stipulating that educational assessments must be unbiased and conducted in the student's primary language.

The handicapped LEP child not only stands a greater chance of being on the receiving end of prejudicial attitudes and treatment, but he or she has educational needs related to language and culture that are not shared by handicapped students who have grown up speaking English in the mainstream culture. When teaching is in English only, the child must make an extra effort to learn the language, as well as the subject matter. This is an onerous burden for all LEP children but is even more crushing for those who are handicapped.

The lack of academic role models who share the language and culture of the child is another disadvantage and so may be the absence of ethnic peers in the school curriculum. Finally, the child may encounter teachers with preconceptions toward his or her group that result in low expectations and a negative self-fulfilling prophecy.

[1]Limited English proficient (LEP) as used in this monograph, refers both to students who speak no English at all, and to those whose proficiency is below native speakers of the same age.

Diversity among LEP children

Both limited English proficient and handicapped children belong to groups that are heterogeneous. The term "handicapped" refers to a wide range of children with disabilities ranging from mild to severe who, when taken as individuals, have far more in common with nonhandicapped children than they do with each other. A child with cerebral palsy, for example, has little in common with a deaf child or a child labeled as learning disabled. What unite children labeled handicapped are the stereotypic perceptions of the nonhandicapped towards them rather than their similarities toward each other.

Similarly, LEP children have in common only their limited proficiency in English (and the extent of proficiency varies widely) and the attitudes of Americans who are native speakers of English to those who are not. There is a great deal of diversity between native speakers of different languages and between groups and individuals speaking a common language. The estimated 3.6 million American school-age children who are limited English proficient are members of groups that lived in North America before European immigration (American Indians), groups settled in parts of America before the American revolution (Mexican Americans in the southwest), and groups that immigrated in previous generations as well as first generation immigrants.

Diversity among speakers of the same language is illustrated by speakers of Spanish (Hispanics) - the largest group of minority language speakers in America today. This group includes families who trace ancestry to Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, as well as other Latin American nations. Some are recent immigrants and some belong to families that have resided in America for hundreds of years. Their common language, Spanish, varies widely according to country of origin. The same word may have a completely different meaning in two different countries or regions, and differences in the rate of speech and social conventions about its use are common. Levels of acculturation vary widely as well. A Mexican American family may speak English with native proficiency and not speak any Spanish, speak both English and Spanish, or be proficient only in Spanish.

Asian Americans are a heterogeneous group speaking a variety of languages and tracing ancestry to China, Japan, Korea, the Philippines, countries in Southern and Eastern Asia including Vietnam and Laos as well as others, and Pacific Islands such as Guam and Samoa.

American Indians come from many tribes with diverse languages and cultures. Although native language usage among Indians has atrophied in response to years of language suppression policies by the government, a recent estimate found 252 languages spoken by American Indian children.

It is obvious that stereotypes are not useful for understanding language minority children or handicapped children. Both groups need to be seen as American children with needs that must be discovered on an individual basis. A recent article made this point delightfully in reference to one group of Americans:

"Any stereotypical attributes of Asian/Pacific Americans are thus insensitive to differences in the cultural heritages of Guamanian Americans (who might speak Chamorro and eat red rice), Filipino Americans (who might speak Visayan and eat white rice), Hawaiian Americans (who might speak the Hawaiian English dialect and eat French fries), Chinese Americans (who might speak Mandarin, and who might eat long-grained white rice), Indian Americans (who might speak Hindi, and who might be strict vegetarians), Japanese Americans (who might speak French, no Japanese, and eat short grained white rice with Southern fried chicken), and Korean Americans (who might speak Japanese, no Korean, and eat tacos).[2]

Achievement of LEP children in schools

Parallels between being handicapped and being a member of a language minority group should not be construed to mean that speaking a native language other than English is a handicap in itself. English proficiency may be mastered like any other skill, and its absence is not comparable to a permanent disability. The ability to speak another language is a strength to be maintained. Our national inability to communicate in languages other than English has been a cause of economic loss to American companies competing in foreign markets and embarassing diplomatic gaffes by our leaders when travelling abroad. Children fluent in both English and another language are national assets.

Speaking a language other than English can be made into a handicap when a school does not provide educational input that is comprehensible to the child. When this occurs, English language learning and subject matter learning are both arrested. Unfortunately being thrown into an English-only environment has been the experience of many LEP children - school drop out rates attest to the failure of the method.

Of native born Filipinos, 80 per cent fail to complete high school. Drop out rates as high as 85 percent have been reported for Puerto Rican students in New York City, while recent national estimates found that 45 percent of Mexican American and American Indian children who began elementary school dropped out before completing high school.

If nonhandicapped LEP children have so much difficulty in our present school system, what can we say of the genuinely handicapped child from a nonEnglish speaking home? Certainly that, without careful attention to needs of language and culture in addition to needs generated by the disability, the educational enterprise will be doomed to failure.

[2]Mizokawa, D.T. and Morishima, J.K. The education for, by, and of Asian/pacific Americans, I. Research Review of Equal Education 1979, Vol. 3, 3, p. 26.

New directions

It is recent that the need for bilingual special education has been identified and much remains to be done before the handicapped LEP student will be out of "double jeopardy." The present monograh is intended to provide special educators with some guidelines to help them succeed in their work with minority language students. The common thread in this discussion is the necessity to bring the social context into educational planning by considering differences in language and culture as well as our attitudes as educators toward them. Topics covered include the history of LEP children in special education, classroom needs of LEP handicapped children, methods of working with minority language parents, and issues in the assessment of LEP children. Also included is a selected bibliography for those who wish to do further reading.

immigration from southern and eastern European countries into the United States as a great period. They had already focused their attention on those poorer segments of society believed to threaten the fitness of the rest of the social organism. Because recent nonEnglish speaking immigrants tended to be poor, they came under scrutiny. The prevailing opinion, fueled by Eugenic reasoning, was that the new immigrants were inferior to those who came from areas of northern and western Europe at earlier periods.

Prominent educators echoed the negative evaluation of the nonEnglish speaking child. A widely used college textbook on education contrasted the new immigrants with the old. Those from northern and western European countries were described as valuable additions to national life, while the new immigrants were seen as passive, shiftless, and lacking in public decency. The children of the new immigrants were seen as a threat to the American way of life.

Social Darwinism had strongly influenced educational practice. A generation of minority language speaking children were taught by teachers trained to believe that the language and culture of the child were marks of inferiority to be extinguished as quickly as possible. The same attitudes made it seem natural so that many children who spoke foreign languages were labeled mentally deficient and placed in special education.

The rise of intelligence tests and their use on LEP children

The introduction of intelligence testing contributed to the placement of nonhandicapped LEP children in special education classes. The testing movement in the United States was instigated by psychologists who expounded the Eugenic philosophy. They saw the new Binet test as a scientific tool which would justify their theories about group and individual intelligence levels. While the original test was intended only to discriminate between normal and slow learners so that special methods could be administered to those who needed it, Eugenicists such as H.H. Goddard and Lewis Terman used their versions of Binet's test for other purposes.

Binet had warned against teachers using his test to describe the cause of slow learning (e.g. mental retardation) or to predict future development from the test. He believed that intelligence was too complex to be described by one number on a test. By contrast the Eugenicists believed that the test results measured unchangeable innate ability and that they could be used to rank individuals and groups accordingly.

Goddard was a pioneer in American special education who achieved recognition as the director of the Vineland Training School for the Feebleminded in Vineland, New Jersey. He focused much of his attention on "high grade defectives" and invented the term "moron" to describe them. He felt that this group was responsible for many of society's problems, including alcoholism and prostitution.

II. MINORITY LANGUAGE STUDENTS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION: AN HISTORICAL AND CURRENT PERSPECTIVE

The historical treatment of language minority groups in special education is important background information for today's teachers and administrators. It is not possible to fully understand many of our present issues without the perspective of the past. We are still in the process of extricating ourselves from mistaken assumptions and practices that rose in the early history of special education in this century. By knowing what happened previously we can avoid repeating errors, and through awareness of historical abuses visited upon minority children we can better understand some present day parent attitudes towards the special education system.

The growth of ungraded classes

Special ungraded classes for "backward" children were created, in part, as a response to the large influx of foreign language speaking immigrant children in the early years of this century. At that time compulsory schooling laws were widely enforced for the first time. The schools were faced with large numbers of children who, because of their English language deficiency, did not fit into the existing school system but were required by law to remain within it. The schools responded by creating ungraded classes for children who were not making satisfactory progress. In addition to nonEnglish speakers, these classes were attended by children described as "incorrigible", "defective", and 'feebleminded". Special education owed a large part of its growth between 1900 and 1920 to the presence of nonEnglish speaking children in the schools.

The attitudes of educators to the new immigrant children were strongly influenced by Social Darwinism and the Eugenics movement. In the late 19th century Darwin's theory of evolution began to be misapplied to human societies. Darwin stated that evolution works through the survival of the fittest species. The Social Darwinists looked at their own society and decided that the fittest people were those at the top of the socioeconomic ladder, and that the least fit were those at the bottom of it. The financially successful were deemed more intelligent than those with lower socioeconomic status.

Social Darwinists also used the theory of selection to "prove" that some nations and races were more intelligent than others. Sir Francis Galton, a pioneer in the study of intelligence, believed that Europeans, in general, and upper class English men, in particular (the group to which he belonged), were the most advanced humans from an evolutionary standpoint. NonEuropean nations were believed to be made up of inferior people with less intelligence by Galton and his prominent and influential disciples.

The belief that segments of society and that some nations and races are inferior to others led to the Eugenics movement. Eugenicists worried that inferior people might pollute the quality of their own group's and humanity's genetic fitness. They advocated the improvement of the human species by selective breeding practices. Eugenicists saw the wave of

Eugenics wanes but misplacement continues

The Eugenics position became less popular in the late 1920's and 1930's. Hitler's rise to prominence in Germany on an essentially Eugenic platform, made hereditary claims of superiority and inferiority for ethnic groups unpopular. Even Terman and Goddard revised their original views.

However, attitudes towards minority language children unfortunately, changed very little. Their language and cultural differences were still viewed as problems to be overcome. Only now the explanation for their supposed deficiencies were cultural rather than hereditary.

The new explanation stated that the culture of some minority language groups was deficient in areas necessary to support children's cognitive development. From the 1930's until the 1960's, articles appeared which described Mexican Americans as passive, fatalistic, and unmotivated to achieve in school because of a culture reputed to be tomorrow oriented. Teachers were trained to believe that membership in such a culture was, of itself, an educational disadvantage. Schools, therefore, continued to try and remake minority children to conform with Anglo cultural patterns, and they continued to accept the overrepresentation of minority language children in special education classrooms as appropriate. I.Q. tests, even when given to children in a language they had not mastered, continued to be used for placement purposes. All these abuses were supported by the social context of the time.

Recent history

As the social climate changed, the overrepresentation of minority children was no longer viewed as tolerable. During the 1960's demands for equality of opportunity and the recognition of minority rights led to a reexamination of assessment and placement procedures. Pervasive discrimination against minorities was documented.

Dunn had estimated in 1968 that 60 to 80 percent of the students being served in the mildly handicapped categories were poor and belonged to ethnic minorities. He argued that special education was not justified for such students who were not in fact handicapped. Subsequent studies provided support for Dunn's estimate and zeroed in on those aspects of assessment and placement that were biased.

Mercer investigated how people were labeled mentally retarded in Riverside, California, in a study that has become classic. She found that schools were responsible for more labeling than other institutions in the community and that Mexican Americans and blacks were significantly more likely to be labeled retarded than whites.

She found, too, that students labeled and placed in special education seldom made it back into the regular program, and seldom completed high school. The educable mentally retarded label provided a one-way ticket to

Goddard saw the Binet test as a way to discriminate between persons of normal and borderline intelligence. He used his own version of the Binet test (the first introduced in the United States) on arriving immigrants at Ellis Island in New York City. Given the conditions of testing, Goddard's results, that higher percentages of immigrants were feebleminded than of native born Americans, are not surprising.

Goddard tested people who were hungry, tired, and exhausted following long sea voyages in cramped quarters. Goddard's version of the Binet test was a particularly harsh one which classified persons as borderline whose scores would have been normal on later editions of the test. Nonetheless Goddard believed that his tests of nonEnglish speaking immigrants' intelligence were valid.

Perhaps this experience made Goddard so suspicious of LEP children. He cautioned against teachers attributing the child's slow progress in school to the inability to speak English. Goddard believed that speaking a foreign language might be a mask for feeblemindedness! Lack of English ability might be the result of mental deficiency, just as (according to Goddard) an alcoholic's lack of productivity was not due to drinking but to feeblemindedness, the underlying root of both problems.

Other scholars with similar preconceptions found other evidence that foreign language speakers in America were inferior to naturalized Americans. A prominent professor at Columbia University compiled studies testing the intelligence of Italian American children. These immigrant children scored one standard deviation (or 15 I.Q. points) below non-immigrant children. (This is the same difference found between whites and some minority groups today). In a similar vein, intelligence tests of United States soldiers in World War I were broken down by ethnic origin to "prove" that newly arrived immigrants were less intelligent than other Americans.

Lewis Terman, author of the Stanford-Binet test, also took the Eugenic position. In his classic work The Measurement of Intelligence (1916) he took the position that Spanish speaking Americans and blacks had low quality intelligence suited only for laboring tasks and that educators would do best to separate these children in schools.

As ludicrous as the methods and conclusions of the Eugenicists now appear, their influence in their own day and down to the present time has been enormous. The I.Q. test was used to place LEP children in special education classrooms despite the inability of the children to understand the language of the test. Identification as mentally inferior seemed natural in the light of prevailing racist ideas about the intelligence levels of different groups. In this way I.Q. tests validated what psychologists already believed.

The new education for the handicapped law and the lawsuits of the late 1960's and 70's heralded the end of the era that began with the Eugenic philosophy and its apparently scientific labeling of minority language children as inferior. The intervening years had shown that what had appeared scientific in the 1920's and 1930's was only an attempt to justify preconceived prejudice and was not based on empiricism at all.

One legacy of the period was the institutionalization of intelligence tests for special education placement and tolerance for the overplacement of minority children that resulted. The assimilationist approach to minority students led educators to believe that their linguistic and cultural differences from children they were used to were handicaps that needed to be remedied. Special education and mainstream teachers tried to eliminate classrooms behaviors that reflected the child's home culture. It was customary, for example, to punish Mexican American children for speaking Spanish in school. A student named Carlos would be called "Charles" by his teacher. Through the indiscriminate use of the I.Q. test and the denial of the minority child's unique cultural and linguistic characteritics, the schools actualized their belief that the child's heritage was a disability to be overcome.

Issues for the 80's

Our most pressing issues today evolved from the historical period that has been described. These are: (1) the need for establishing unbiased, reliable and valid assessment and placement practices; (2) the need for teacher training and program development to meet the needs of handicapped LEP children who are identified; and (3) the need for special education programs to involve parents of minority language children in the planning and implementation of their children's education.

Current sensitivity to charges of bias in testing are linked to past abuses and present regulations are attempts to prevent recurrences of these problems. Some have asserted that the pendulum has now swung the other way and that concern for fairness has made it too difficult for minority language students to receive special placements when they are needed. We do know that nationwide handicapped migrant children are underidentified and underserved. It is also likely that Childfind projects to identify preschool handicapped children may be less successful in reaching minority language communities because of the communication problem. Yet at the same time there is evidence to suggest that some overrepresentation of minority students in special education continues. Whether in fact the pendulum has swung the other way can only be answered on a district by district basis.

A 1981 U.S. Government study found nationwide overrepresentation of American Indians in the learning disabled category and of Asian Americans in the speech impairment category. Hispanics were not represented inequitably in special education at the national level, but other evidence has indicated overrepresentation in some of the geographic areas in which

educational oblivion. What made the situation more tragic was that so many of the children labeled were normally functioning children in their communities. These students, in effect, were "6 hour retardates": labeled during their school hours yet normal during the rest of their lives.

Mercer's findings at Riverside were replicated at the state level in California and nationwide. Minorities were found to be significantly more likely to be placed in special education classes for the mildly retarded in cities across the country. At the same time the use of I.Q. tests came under increasing fire. Minority psychologists in particular criticized the assumptions behind intelligence testing and questioned the tests' validity for minority students.

Parents of minority children began to press lawsuits against school districts that misplaced their children in special education on the basis of intelligence tests. Arreola v. Board of Education (1968), Covarrubias v. San Diego Unified School District (1971), Diana v. State Board of Education (1970), and Larry P. v. Riles (1972) led to the prohibition of assessment and placement practices that had been in effect for decades.

The Larry P. case was particularly important because the validity of I.Q. tests was at issue. Judge Peckham ruled that intelligence tests were biased against children whose life experiences were different than those the test had been normed on. The test could not distinguish between unfamiliarity with the item and the inability to do an item which a child's experience had not prepared him or her for. Minority children were unfairly penlized because of differences in their life experiences.

The courts acted during the same period to safeguard the rights of LEP students. In Lau v. Nichols (1974) the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that the regular education program offered to English speaking students was not appropriate for students with limited English background because it denied them equal educational opportunity. School districts were ordered to create programs to meet the language needs of LEP children or face the loss of federal educational funds. Bilingual education, the preferred remedy in the eyes of many minority parents and educators was given a strong boost by the decision.

The social climate which promoted recognition of ethnic and language minority rights also affected attitudes towards the handicapped. Public Law 94-142 (1975) was written to end the exclusion of handicapped children from public schools, a common practice in the past. At the same time it sought to end the discriminatory assessment and placement practices that had gone on unchecked until the early 1970's. The law specifically required assessments to be done in the child's language of greatest proficiency and built parent involvement into the process of educational planning, specifying the use of language interpreters when necessary.

Summary

The growth of ungraded classes in American public schools at the turn of the century resulted in large part from a large influx of foreign language speaking immigrant children that the existing educational system was not prepared to handle. Concurrently, ethnocentric views about the relative intelligence levels of different groups were being given support by the misapplication of Darwin's theory of evolution to social problems. Eugenic psychologists who feared America's diminution through the mixing of "healthy" native stocks with "inferior" foreign ones introduced I.Q. testing in America and influenced educators to seek out and segregate the child with "borderline" intelligence. It should be remembered that the children causing such concern over their supposedly low intelligence levels were white children who spoke nonEnglish languages.

Language and ethnic minority students were overplaced in classes for the feebleminded (later called retarded) from the Eugenic era to the present time. The overplacement was supported initially by the Eugenic view that minority children are inferior due to heredity and more recently by the view that they are inferior due to deficiencies in their culture. The I.Q.test, revised from the original Binet version and introduced in America by Eugenicists, was used by schools for the purpose of assessing children and placing them in special education settings. The use of the I.Q. test, while increasingly controversial, has survived through the present time.

The changing social climate of the 1960's and 70's brought attacks on the placement of minorities in special education classes. Overrepresentation of minorities in mildly handicapping categories was documented nationwide, and the prime cause was found to be the inaccurate interpretation of the I.Q. tests given to linguistic and culturally different students.

Today special education's relationship to minority students is in transition. There are simultaneous concerns to identify and serve presently unserved handicapped LEP children and to avoid placing nonhandicapped minority students in special education by insuring nonbiased assessment. The monocultural assimilationist approach to the minority child is being replaced with a recognition of cultural pluralism.

Current problems are linked to past history. We have an immediate need to train more teachers with bilingual education and special education competencies, to devise more useful means of assessing language minority children, and to build more productive relationships between teachers and language minority parents.

Institutions change slowly, and the schools are no exception. Many assumptions that special educators accepted in the past are now being questioned by the field as a whole. Examples include the validity of distinctions between the mildly handicapped categories and the usefulness of I.Q. tests. Special education is moving to obliterate those remnants of discrimination that emerged in a period in which "scientific" racism held

they live in large numbers. That overrepresentation continues to be a problem for minority groups was confirmed by a report that blacks were four times as likely as whites to be placed in the educable mentally retarded category in New Jersey as recently as 1980.

While assessment remains problematic, so much attention has been paid to it that the equally pressing need to provide services to identified handicapped LEP children has at times been obscured. The purpose of assessment is to improve learning opportunities for the student. The second pressing issue today is that appropriate programs for this population are few and far between.

The small number of teachers and support personnel who combine competencies in the areas of bilingual and special education is largely responsible for the situation. Bilingual teachers are taught to work with normal LEP children, and special education teachers are trained to work with exceptional children who are English proficient. The needs of the exceptional LEP child place him or her in an educational no man's land.

While bilingual teachers require coursework on exceptionality, special education teachers need to learn more about linguistic and culturally different children including characteristics of their languages, learning styles, values, and motivation. Most special education training facilities today have few multicultural materials on hand.

The scarcity of individuals with competencies in both areas was shown by a recent mailing of the bilingual education/special education interest group of the National Association for Bilingual Education. The names and addresses of all the members across the country fit onto both sides of one typed page.

The same problem exists with support personnel. Speech/language pathologists with native speaking ability in a second language are a rare commodity. The American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) had only 114 Hispanics with M.A. degrees in its membership in 1981, and only 11 Ph.D's.

The third problem confronting special educators working with minority language children is difficulty in facilitating the parent involvement that is mandated by law. The legacy of historical discrimination, differing cultural views about the role of the teacher, and inadequate training of teachers to communicate cross-culturally, have all contributed to this need. Special education teachers have reported difficulty in getting some parents of minority language children to appear at IEP (Individualized Educational Program) meetings or to participate in the process if they did appear. In these cases, the partnership in planning stipulated by P.L. 94-142 is not existing. Teacher and parent are both impoverished by the resulting lack of communication about the child's needs and abilities, and the child's education suffers as a result. Special educators can build relationships with minority parents by showing sensitivity to their concerns, by communicating effectively across cultures, and by being sure that assessments of children are really fair. Specific ways of operationalizing each of these suggestions are presented in later sections.

III. CLASSROOM NEEDS OF MINORITY LANGUAGE CHILDREN

Assimilationism vs. Pluralism

It took hundreds of years for science to decenter its notion of the universe - to discover that the sun does not revolve around the earth but that the opposite is true. We have been less successful as a species in decentering our notion of the social universe. Ethnocentrism, the view that one's own particular group is the center around which the other groups revolve, appears to be a deeply ingrained human trait. While pride, identity, and knowledge of one's ethnic heritage are invaluable, ethnocentrism is not.

Ethnocentrism establishes the values and ways of a single group as the "right" values and ways. Ethnocentrics view their own lifestyle as "normal" and those of other groups as strange. Extreme ethnocentrism results in the view that one's group is superior to others, that "we" are the true human beings and the others are less so. The Eugenicists described in the last section were classic examples of ethnocentrism run amok, so blinded by their own beliefs that they created a false science to support them.

Ethnocentrism in schools results in members of one group trying to get members of another group to acculturate to their values. Since ethnocentric attitudes are often unconscious, those who hold them believe that they are genuinely acting in the best interests of the children they are trying to change. They may become frustrated and angry when children resist their best efforts and make little educational progress to boot.

Acculturation is an unsuccessful educational strategy because it takes so much away from the child who is being asked to change. Children bring knowledge, learning style, ways of communicating and experiencing things, and their sense of identity from their homes. All these have developed over the years. If a school allows no place for a child's culture, it serves him or her from the foundation of past experience on which all future knowledge is built. It creates an identity crisis for the child by forcing a choice between school ways and home ways. Neither choice is satisfactory without the other. Successful minority students have described personal anguish at the sense of loss and shame experienced when educational goals were achieved at the expense of their tradition. It is neither educationally nor psychologically sound to expect children to learn this way.

The alternative approach, pluralism, uses the student's culture to build upon for learning and the enhancement of self concept. The goal is for minority students to function effectively in the mainstream culture as well as in their own. Students should be able to maintain pride and identity in their heritage, while recognizing that their group's way is one among others.

sway. A promising departure point and perhaps the most important one in this change is in the attitude of the special education teacher to the minority language and culture child. This will be the first topic in the next section.

Cross cultural communication

When people from different cultures interact, behavioral cues are commonly misinterpreted. This takes place because a behavior that has a specific communicative meaning to one group can have an entirely different meaning to another. Teachers and students may both be confused when communicative signals are misinterpreted by the other.

Eye contact is one behavior that varies widely between groups. In some cultures children commonly avert their eyes from adults as a sign of respect and deference. An Anglo teacher may become angry when an American Indian child looks away while being spoken to, assuming that the child is being disrespectful when the opposite is true. As the teacher raises her voice, the child will become more frightened and less likely still to make the eye contact the teacher expects. Had the child acceded to the teacher's demand to look her in the eyes, its cultural meaning to the child would have been hostility and defiance.

Cultural differences in emotional expression also cause classroom problems. Groups vary in the way they react to frustration. Many Asian Americans channel their feelings inward. A member of the culture would be cued to hostility building by a sudden increase in politeness or other "good" behavior. A teacher unfamiliar with socially acceptable ways of expressing anger in the Asian culture might see no problem at all. The end result might be an emotional explosion after the child's frustration reached an uncontrollable level. The same teacher would be mystified by the child's sudden demonstration of "bad" behavior, since so much "good" behavior had preceded it.

Groups also differ in their tolerance of silence in the presence of others. To many mainstream Americans silence is awkward and discomforting. For some minority groups silence is a natural part of being with another person. When members of these two groups are together, the occasional silence of the minority group member can be easily misconstrued as displeasure or anger. Groups may also differ in the loudness of their voices (the English think Americans are excessively loud in public places), the usual distance between speakers (a member of a group that expects more space will feel intruded upon by a person whose group stands close together when speaking), and in their comfort with being touched. Without an awareness of these factors, messages will be mixed and confused when people of different backgrounds interact. Because culture affects so many areas of human experience, the possibilities for miscommunication are almost endless!

A description of the relevant cultural characteristics of the different groups which LEP speakers belong to is beyond the scope of this monograph but other help is available. The Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (O.S.P.I.) has published several "Guides to understanding people, language, and culture", each focusing on a different minority language group that is represented in Washington's schools. These are available from the bilingual education office at O.S.P.I. Another way to

Translated into school, decentering promotes a culturally pluralistic ethic that is accepting of all children. The importance of such an attitude for teaching minority children cannot be overstated. The teacher's attitude on this issue undergirds the entire educational approach to the minority child.

How teacher attitudes affect learning

Teachers may have expectancies about children's ability to learn that are not based on their actual competence as learners but on characteristics such as an accent, perceived socioeconomic status, or ethnic group membership. If this is so, the teacher is likely to behave in ways that cause the preconception to come true. One example is failing to call on a student in class because of the assumption that he/she won't know the answer or calling on another student if the first child does not give the correct response immediately. A positive expectancy may result in a teacher calling on a child more often or allowing more time when the answer is slow in coming.

Even young children are adept at reading teacher messages about their learning potential. One study found that seven year olds could tell a teacher's opinion about a child's ability by her reaction to a low test score. They interpreted her anger to mean that the student was capable of doing better but had not tried hard enough. They linked kindness and pity with low student ability. In this way teachers unconsciously create self-fulfilling prophecies.

Teacher attitudes may be unconsciously affected by aspects of ethnicity. A study provided a group of teachers with a fictitious student file and indicated to one half of them that the child was Mexican American and to the other half that the child was an Anglo. Even though the student files were completely identical, the group that believed the child Mexican American was more likely to recommend that the child be placed in special education.

Expectations about intelligence might be made unconsciously upon hearing a dialect or accent. Brooklynese has become associated through old movies with tough dumb crooks, although a wide range of people speak with this accent. Upon hearing the Brooklyn accent a listener may have unconscious associations with stupidity and criminality. In the same way children who speak low status dialects or who have obvious accents may be also pigeonholed unjustly.

The handicapped minority language child is a prime candidate for negative teacher preconceptions that will affect learning. Stereotypes are common to most of us and operate unconsciously. When working with minority children, we need to consciously lay aside our prejudgments so that the child may be perceived as an individual. Teachers who maintain high expectations for minority students help them achieve. LEP students, like other students, benefit from good teaching and being treated fairly - pity should have no place in the classroom.

Two groups that tend to have external loci of control are minority students and handicapped students. Some minority students may develop externality as a response to their parents' poverty: poor people have fewer choices to make in life than people with more money. Children may see their parents' strenuous efforts at bettering their lives bringing few rewards. The children of migrant laborers are likely to see their parents in this way. A second way in which minority children may become external is through school experiences. If the teaching and curriculum are geared only to the mainstream child, the minority child feels that equal efforts do not provide equal rewards. Failure in a system that is stacked against the child can be attributed to causes outside the self: in this case the system itself.

Handicapped children may become external through repeated failures in school related to their disability. Learning disabled children are less likely to attribute their failure in school (as well as in other areas) to lack of effort. Their attitude towards school achievement has been described as "learned helplessness." The handicapped child may also learn externality in special education classes that are highly structured and when reinforcement is not contingent upon student effort. Special educators have been so carefully trained to provide positive reinforcement to students, that praise may be used indiscriminately - as in "nice standing in line, nice walking, nice sitting...etc" where praise is not linked to actual effort. Tasks may be so finely sequenced and the environment so highly structured in some special education settings that the student is unable to experience failure or make meaningful choices.

Teachers can help the student develop internal locus of control in several ways. First, they can create an environment in which praise is deserved and failure realistically available. They can reinforce autonomous behavior and self-organization by students. Internality is promoted in less structured environments that allow students to make choices and experience their consequences. Culturally pluralistic classrooms allow minority students to believe that their efforts at achievement will be rewarded.

Multicultural curriculum

Children are more interested in learning when they perceive that the curriculum is relevant to them. A multicultural curriculum makes content more meaningful and links students' emotions to the material to be learned. The student's sense of worth is also heightened when the home experience is represented in school learning tasks.

The Kamehameha Early Education Project (KEEP) in Hawaii is an example of how curriculum relevance can dramatically improve learning of minority students. The program serves children of Polynesian ancestry who live in the very worst neighborhood in Honolulu. In school these children do not learn to read, drop out early, and are frequently seen as retarded by school officials. The KEEP project administered conventional reading programs to the children with no success - after three years they still

become familiar with other cultures is through reading novels about the culture. Rudolfo Anaya's Bless me, Ultima is a fine source of information about traditional Mexican American family values and customs, in addition to being an engrossing story. But the best method is to cultivate friendship with members of the other culture. A teacher with an adult friend in a child's culture has a valuable resource for the interpretation of behavior that confuses him or her.

Cross cultural communication skills are necessary so that the message the teacher sends is the one the child receives, and vice-versa. Their mastery will provide teachers of LEP children with the information they need to assess, teach, and reinforce the child, as well as to interact profitably with parents.

Motivating LEP exceptional children

Cross cultural sensitivity is directly applicable to motivating students from minority cultures. Some methods that are useful with mainstream students can be counterproductive with minorities. Competition in the classroom is an example. Most (but not all) mainstream students enjoy competing against each other and may produce their best work in an individualistic competitive situation. In contrast, many minority students have learned cooperative values and group allegiance over emphasis on the individual. When a teacher asked two American Indian children to do the same arithmetic problem on the board she was surprised at what happened. One student was finished long before the other, but she paused before writing her answer. Only when the second child was in the act of completing her problem did the first child complete hers. In this way she expressed her cultural inhibition to place herself above another.

Teachers can channel the cooperative tendency of language minority students for learning by structuring small group tasks and by the use of peer tutors. If students are uncomfortable with competitive situations their achievement will suffer when they are repeatedly placed in them.

Reinforcers may also differ between groups. Mexican American students are strongly motivated to achieve for their families. An effective reinforcer for the Mexican American child who holds this value will differ from one that is useful with a mainstream child. "Nice work, I'm proud of you" will be less effective than "nice work, your family will be proud of you."

Locus of control

An important aspect of motivation that is attracting increasing attention is locus of control, or attribution. A student who attributes his or her success or failure on a task to effort is aid have an internal locus of control, while the student who blames or credits outside forces such as luck views the self as being externally controlled. Internals do better in school because they believe that their efforts at achievement will be rewarded and so they work harder. The external sees little reason to persist in efforts since success or failure are perceived to be uncontrollable.

fluency in as short a time as possible so that students may profit from their regular classroom placement. Usually students are pulled out of class for a specified time each day and receive structured lessons in English. A disadvantage of the method is that students fall behind in subject matter learning while they are learning English.

Bilingual education is a third approach, and one which the courts have looked upon favorably to remedy the loss of equal educational opportunity that occurs when a student is asked to "sink or swim." The goal of bilingual education is also to bring the child to English proficiency as quickly as possible. Its advantage over the ESL approach is that by using the student's native language for subject matter instruction while English is being learned, the child can continue learning skills which will be transferable to English as it is mastered. With quality bilingual education the child should learn English faster than he or she would in an ESL program alone (ESL may also be one component of a bilingual program). Children will also benefit from increased psychological well being when they learn skills to function in the regular classroom through instruction in their native language and culture.

It has been difficult to make fair evaluations of many ESL and bilingual programs because so many of the teachers who have worked in them have been undertrained. The ability to speak English is not a qualification for teaching ESL nor is fluency in a second language a qualification for teaching in a bilingual classroom. One district in the greater Seattle area reportedly used an ex-coach as an ESL teacher because of his seniority in the district. He had no training in the theory, techniques, or methodology of second language instruction.

Those theories and techniques have evolved considerably since most of us studied a foreign language in high school. At that time language was taught through grammar, drills, and repetition. Most of us taught in this way remember very little of the language we studied and are quite unable to use it for communicative purposes.

New formulations about language acquisition have emphasized the functions and contexts in which language is used and have deemphasized the learnings of grammatical structures. Language acquisition is now viewed as a subconscious process that occurs naturally as people use language for a communicative purpose. That is, an English speaker struggling to buy vegetables in a market where only Spanish is spoken will acquire more of the second language than if he/she spent a comparable time memorizing the names of vegetables in a Spanish-English dictionary. In the first case the learner develops a feel for the language that is unconscious. When words and rules are memorized on the other hand, they are not as easily available for conversational use. The learner has to stop and consciously remember the rule or translate the word before they may be used.

Affect is another important aspect of second language acquisition that has received more attention recently. When the learner is relaxed and highly

could not read. Then planners began to develop a culturally based reading program. They utilized the traditional Hawaiian practice of narrative storytelling as a vehicle to teach reading and achieved dramatic results. For the first time the children began to read. The children served by the KEEP project now are reading above the national level.

The success of the KEEP project can be explained by new findings about reading comprehension that show students understand passages more easily when the passages reflect familiar cultural themes. A study asked college students from India and the United States to read passages describing typical Indian and American weddings. When reading about their own customs students could read faster, remember more information, and provide more elaboration about the passage. Even when learning about the dominant culture, minority children do better when material is presented with reference to experiences that they are already familiar with.

The recognition of ethnic holidays and food are fine first steps, but alone are insufficient for making a curriculum relevant for minority learners. Teachers will need to learn about history from the perspective of all American groups represented in the classroom, to understand something of the values and views of the different cultures, to be aware of student attitudes towards school, and to know the current aspirations, goals, and concerns in the minority and majority communities. With this background information the teacher can create learning experiences for all children that will be truly relevant to their lives.

The success or failure of the multicultural curriculum ultimately comes back to the teacher's attitude. The teacher who respects the uniqueness of all students teaches pluralism through example. The best designed multicultural curriculum will be superficial when presented by a teacher who is unaccepting of minority students. Ultimately, people are more important than materials.

Meeting the need for learning English

There is no questioning the need for LEP children to become proficient in English. What has been a matter of some controversy is which educational method is best to apply to this goal. The oldest technique is to place the LEP child in the regular class with no additional help. This method (or more properly the lack of one) has also been called "sink or swim" and was ruled a violation of the student's right to equal educational opportunities by the United States Supreme Court's decision in 1974 (the Lau decision). Historically, its results have been dismal as high drop out rates for LEP children attest. Recall from section II that European immigrant children swelled the ranks of special education classes because of their inability to make satisfactory school progress in the early 1900's.

A second and more recent approach is called teaching English as a second language (ESL). The ESL approach has the goal of facilitating English

to be sure that the threshold of English readiness has been crossed. If this is not the case, the student may have a need to solidify some basic skills in the native language or to practice the academic use of English before moving on.

In this section three models of second language technique were presented including "sink or swim", English as a second language (ESL), and bilingual education. Of the three alternatives, bilingual education with an ESL component appears most likely to utilize the LEP child's linguistic and cultural background to facilitate eventual successful entry into the mainstream program. Secondly new ideas about second language acquisition were introduced that emphasize the use of language in natural, meaningful situations and deemphasize the memorization of grammatical rules. Suggestions derived from the new approach are designed to provide students with many opportunities to practice language usage in naturally motivating situations.

motivated to learn the language, acquisition proceeds more easily. Scholars have begun to write about an "affective filter" similar to a mental block that exists when the learner is anxious or defensive. When anxiety causes the mental block to be in place, the subconscious process of building competence is more difficult.

The new ideas about second language acquisition have much in common with the way all of us learned our native language. We did not learn by being taught directly but through participation in meaningful communicative situations with parents and others. Our strong motivation to be part of the grown up world around us provided energy for the task.

Anna Chamot of the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education has provided a list of classroom applications for second language learning that is derived from the new research findings. The following suggestions were derived from her work: Drills and repetition should be avoided unless used naturally in songs, games, or rhymes. Children should be allowed to experience a silent period when introduced to a new language, without being pressured for production. When speech begins, errors of grammatical form are to be expected; and rather than respond to these, teachers should focus on children's intended meanings.

To lower the affective filter teachers should work at facilitating good relationships between limited and native English speaking children so that both are motivated to communicate with the other. Small group and paired activities are recommended to increase classroom interaction. Using culturally relevant materials will increase the LEP child's motivation to communicate. Overall, a relaxed and natural classroom will do much to facilitate second language learning.

The language used by teachers is optimal for language learning when it contains useful and relevant information to the children and when it contains comprehensible input. Thus, a discussion of the theory of relativity will do little to aid the learning of English. Telling a student where the cafeteria is in simple language will be a more successful strategy.

A final caution about second language learning is in order. It is now believed that communicative competence, or the ability to use a language in ordinary social situations, differs from academic competence in the same language. A child who speaks English well enough to get by on the playground may not yet have acquired the ability to use the language in an academic setting. A linguistic threshold is hypothesized below in which children are unable to attach new labels to new concepts. Unfortunately there is no simple way to know when a child has passed the threshold and is ready. Therefore, it is recommended that academic uses of English begin with subjects that are less demanding linguistically and that provide contextual clues to the learner. A science experiment where visible action is described provides the student with contextual clues that aid understanding, while an abstract discussion with no visible props does not. As the formerly limited English proficient student is introduced to English subject matter, the teacher should keep a close tab on his/her understanding

Cultural variables to minority exceptional families

Several cultural characteristics of Asian Americans influence their perceptions about handicapped individuals. This group tends to place a higher value on conformity than Anglo Americans do. An obvious disability, because it stands out, can be seen as bringing shame to a family. Nevertheless, families are quite generous and solicitous in their care for the disabled child. An exception may be made in the case of mental/emotional disorders because they are strongly stigmatized. Chinese Americans, for example, feel that the chances of other family members marrying are reduced when the community identifies one family member as having a mental illness. Asian American parents may, therefore, be defensive and upset if school officials imply that there is a problem with a child's mind. The school's desire to conduct psychological testing on a child may be easily misinterpreted. (Of course this generality like all others about any group will not be true for all individuals in the group).

Asian Americans who are recent immigrants bring a different attitude towards teachers and schools than the attitudes found in mainstream parents. They may see the teacher as an authority with complete responsibility for the school program. Consequently, involvement in an IEP conference may be one sided, with the parent assuming a passive, nonparticipatory role. The American special education process needs to be explained to these parents, with an emphasis on the teacher's need for their knowledge about their child's abilities and their goals for him or her. If the new role can be sensitively explained to these parents, they will diligently try to succeed in it.

Mexican Americans also have unique cultural traits that special educators need to be aware of. The traditional Mexican American family emphasizes the role of the eldest male child. If this child has a disability it may be particularly hard for the family to accept. Secondly, the desire among many Mexican American parents for their children to receive instruction in Spanish as well as English should be considered in educational planning. A recent survey of Mexican American parents with hearing impaired children indicated that the majority wanted their children to receive bilingual education.

When special educators work with parents of American Indians and Mexican Americans they should be prepared to prove that services are needed. The history of discrimination against their children in special education (see Section II) makes it understandable that more parents will be suspicious about whether their child has been placed due to ethnicity. In addition to assuring nonbiased assessment, special educators can gain parents' trust by providing evidence of their interest and concern in the child's education and by stressing the advantages to the child which special services offer.

Before moving on, it is necessary to mention that the examples of needs generated by culture presented in this section are by no means exhaustive and are only indicators of the types of variables teachers will deal with when they communicate with minority parents of handicapped children.

IV. FACILITATING PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parent involvement is a basic need in special education programs that is now mandated by law. The discussion in this section focuses on aspects of culture that influence the adjustment of families to handicapping conditions and on ways to conduct effective conferences with minority language parents.

Understanding minority family reactions to exceptionality

Special education teachers are trained to understand the psychological impact of raising a child with a disability upon a family. A stage theory which includes the emotions of shock, denial, anger, sadness, resignation, and acceptance is commonly presented. There is, however, a problem with applying this model to culturally different families - it has been derived almost exclusively from work with white middle class parents. There has been little recognition that a reaction to a disability is rooted in culture; it is influenced by the way a group evaluates handicapped individuals as well as by parental aspirations for children that are culturally determined. Even the definition of what constitutes a disability varies from group to group.

Some traditional cultures killed obviously handicapped infants at birth, while others cared tenderly for them. In Islamic countries and in some parts of India, retarded people are perceived as saint-like innocents who bring good fortune. That attitude is in sharp contrast to the stigmatization of the retarded that is the rule in the American mainstream culture.

No handicap is absolute - it is always given meaning through its cultural content. Consider traditional Chinese women who bound their feet according to custom and thereby lost much of their ability to walk. Although disabled in our terms they were not considered handicapped in their own culture. A study of thalidomide children in Canada found that their mothers' adjustments were influenced more by culture and the reactions of the community to the child and less by the nature of the disability itself than would have been expected. A woman whose child was only mildly affected in one hand was unable to accept the child's condition due to her cuture's devaluation of persons so afflicted. Mothers from different cultural backgrounds with much more severely involved children made better adjustments.

The relativity of disability is a useful concept to keep in mind when working with parents of different cultures. Teachers will need to discover what the child's handicap means to the family in their own cultural terms. The little information that is available indicates that parent needs vary considerably according to culture.

circular arrangement of chairs arranged around a table works best to create an atmosphere of equality. When a teacher meets alone with a parent, it is better to sit side by side or facing each other in chairs than for the teacher to face the parent from behind his or her desk. The desk acts as a barrier to communication and sends a message of inaccessibility.

Teachers will need to be sure that all relevant family members are present at the conference. In some groups extended family are deeply involved in day to day caretaking responsibilities of children and in making decisions that affect them as well. It will be important for the teacher to allow the family to decide which members should come to the educational conference. If this is not done, teachers may spend time talking with a family member unable and unwilling to make a decision on his or her own. Flexibility in meeting time should allow other family members with different schedules to come to conferences.

When parents continue to break appointments or state that their schedule makes it impossible to come to school, teachers can suggest a meeting in the home. Home visits have the added benefit of allowing the teacher to learn more about the child's living situation than would ever be possible in a school conference. Families are also more likely to be relaxed in their own homes than at the school.

Classrooms and schools can be decorated in ways that communicate openness and acceptance to all parents. The author had the pleasure of working in a Seattle public elementary school which had posters proclaiming "Welcome" in seven different languages near the main entrance. Photographs of students from many different ethnic backgrounds lined a nearby hallway. The school library had a large collection of ethnic books prominently displayed on shelves that visitors passed by. Parents of all backgrounds sensed they were welcome from the moment they walked in the door.

Perhaps the best place for teachers to demonstrate the difference between the new special education and the old is in parent-teacher conferences and at IEP meetings.

Conducting conferences with minority language parents

Conferences are especially important to parents with LEP backgrounds because they are less likely to be familiar with the school system than other parents. The typical one-page written request for a parent's permission for testing is insufficient explanation for many minority language parents unfamiliar with American school procedures - this is particularly true for first generation immigrants. School officials will need to explain carefully the need and purpose for testing to allay parents' fears.

Problems in transition will certainly arise with terms such as "learning disability." The definition of that term has been difficult enough for English speakers! It will be best to describe student needs in terms of current performance and curricular standards. When categorical labels such as learning disabled or mentally retarded are used, they should be explained carefully with many opportunities for parents to ask questions. If parents have no questions, it should not be assumed that they understand or agree with what they have been presented with. Silence, especially in a limited English speaker, may signify lack of comprehension.

Speaking directly to a parent is the ideal but is not possible when parent and teacher have no common language; then a translator is necessary. Selection of a translator is vitally important and should be made with an eye toward more qualities than language proficiency alone. A translator will help parents and staff best when he or she is familiar and comfortable with both the world of the school and the world of the parent. A bilingual teacher may be an ideal person for this task. Speaking through a translator can be frustrating - it is sometimes difficult to know how much is being understood by both parties. There can also be a feeling of being left out while conversation continues in the other language. For these reasons it is best to build a good working relationship with a translator who can be used regularly. When the translator and teacher have a comfortable working relationship it will help parents relax as well.

In all conferences with LEP parents it is important that nothing be taken for granted. The parent's understanding of what is going on at school may be quite limited. Teachers should check frequently their assumptions about what the parent knows and understands.

Seating at conferences is an important element in creating an atmosphere of comfort or discomfort. If an IEP conference is conducted with school staff on one side of a table and a parent alone on the other side, chances of parent participation are diminished. Likewise, it is best to avoid a situation in which school staff sit in adult-size chairs and parents sit on child-sized chairs from which they must look up when they speak. A

When a LEP child is suspected of having a language disorder, assessment by a speech/language pathologist who is fluent in the child's native language is necessary. A knowledge of normal language development in the native tongue and the population the child belongs to is essential. Otherwise, language characteristics normally caused by the interaction of two languages in bilingual speakers can be mistaken for true disorders. Monolingual clinicians who lack knowledge of normal language development in the child's first language and in bilingual speakers cannot make this distinction.

Steps prior to assessment

More judicious use of tests occurs when other steps precede formal assessment. When a teacher becomes concerned about student achievement or classroom behavior, the child's parent should be contacted immediately. The parent is the first and usually the best single source of information about a child. The teacher may learn from the parent that the child is reacting to a family tragedy or recovering form a serious illness. The parent can describe the child's history, expressed attitudes toward school, and abilities demonstrated by behavior in the home, thereby, corroborating or alleviating a teacher's concern. The teacher can gather valuable information about the culture of the home by meeting with the parent. In many cases children have shown dramatic improvement in school behavior simply as a result of knowing that the parent and teacher are working together.

A prior parent meeting is also beneficial when problems continue and further assessment is necessary. The parent included in the early stages of concern over a problem is less likely to react with surprise or anger when asked to give permission for a formal assessment. Should special education prove to be necessary, the parent is more likely to participate comfortably in the IEP meeting, having already experienced the role of partner with the school.

When concerns continue, alternative classroom strategies should be implemented. Perhaps the student will respond more favorably to more structure or less than he or she is currently receiving, to peer tutoring, or to a different approach to reading than the one being used. A variety of strategies should be given a reasonable amount of time to succeed before concluding that the student is unable to achieve in the present placement.

In a few cases a personality clash between student and teacher may be responsible for the problem. Awareness of a student's educational history becomes essential. If the student got along with last year's teacher and did satisfactory work, it is less likely that present problems are caused by a handicapping condition. When a real problem exists between a student and teacher, it is more logical to try the student in another regular classroom than to refer the child to special education.

V. ASSESSMENT OF MINORITY LANGUAGE STUDENTS

If a psychoanalyst were to give an educator a word association test, the response to "assessment" would likely be "test." Tests are so widely employed to assess student that we tend to forget that they are only one part of an assessment and not synonymous with assessment itself. In fact, indiscriminate use and overreliance on tests are the primary causes of bias in the assessment of LEP children.

In addition to tests, other approaches should be taken to arrive at a comprehensive picture of the LEP child's present level of performance; these will include nonstandardized measures of language proficiency in both the child's first and second languages, measures of adaptive behavior in the home and the community, as well as naturalistic observations of the child in various settings.

Measuring language proficiency

In the case of the language minority child, the first issue to be resolved concerns the child's language proficiency. Questions to be answered include which language the child has most proficiency in, and if English proficiency is sufficient for placement in a regular classroom. When the LEP child is not learning in a current placement concerns about possible handicapping conditions are premature. Language needs must be ascertained and met with appropriate methods (see Section III) before further concerns are appropriate.

Currently available tests of language proficiency and dominance are not completely satisfactory to determine whether or not a student is proficient enough to profit from regular class placement. This is because the tests tap structural language abilities such as phonology, vocabulary, grammar, and syntax rather than the use of language for functional purposes such as conveying information or asking a question. These measures of communicative competence are more important for success in school than the ability to demonstrate a knowledge of grammatical rules or vocabulary on a test. Tests of language dominance and proficiency that are weighted towards language structure (as opposed to language use) do not correlate well with each other, nor with actual student achievement in the classroom.

When language proficiency tests are used they should be supplemented with informal interviews and naturalistic observations of the student's use of language in different settings. Elicited or observed language should be assessed according to its appropriateness in the social context in which it occurs, and according to the amount of information and types of meaning that are conveyed. The student's ability to obtain needed information and clarification from other speakers should also be noted. Elicited speech situations should be natural and structured with a measure of cross cultural sensitivity. It should always be remembered that interviewer characteristics and the quality of rapport established with the student will strongly influence the language sample produced by the child.

between languages so that translated items will not have the same level of difficulty intended by the test designers. Secondly, the cultural experiences that the test is based on remain unchanged when the language is translated. A student from a different background is still penalized because he or she has not had some of the experiences the test is based on.

For the same reason attempts to create nonverbal culture-free tests have failed. Nonverbal tasks are also based on past experience and cognitive styles that are culturally influenced. What's more, cultural variables abound in the testing situation. A Latin American child whose culture discourages speaking without knowing (hablando sin saber) may be less likely to guess an answer than an Anglo child.

Finally, I.Q. tests do not measure innate ability as the Eugenicists (see Section II) and the popular press believe. Significant gains in I.Q. scores following an experimental treatment have been frequently reported in research literature. Many educational programs for handicapped and poverty children evaluated their effectiveness by demonstrating a positive change in I.Q. scores. Thus a low I.Q. score may be due to cultural differences or to poor schooling, as well as to a handicapping condition such as mental retardation. The test itself does not make these distinctions but provides a unitary score that can easily be misinterpreted.

Criterion-referenced tests

The norm referenced test is limited in the information it provides about a student's strengths and weaknesses. Knowing a student's percentile standing provides little information about what educational needs are most urgent and what methods will be most appropriate to meet them. The criterion-referenced test does provide useful educational information because it evaluates the student's behavior in terms of specific tasks.

Criterion-referenced tests measure the child's performance against an educationally relevant criterion, for example, the ability to name colors or solve addition with two number single digit math problems. When criterion measures are chosen from curriculum requirements at the child's grade level, the discrepancy between present performance and what is considered satisfactory achievement can be pinpointed. The extent of the discrepancy will help determine the intensity and type of extra educational help the student needs. When new programs are introduced, the criterion-referenced measures can continue to be used to monitor the child's progress towards specified criteria.

Mild handicapping conditions

Biased assessment occurs when normal behavioral characteristics of a child's culture are mistaken for symptoms of a handicapping condition. The problem is most acute in the mildly handicapped categories: mild mental retardation, learning disabilities, and emotional/behavioral disabilities. We have seen that these categories have historically been repositories for many nonhandicapped poor minority children.

When parent consultation and regular classroom resources have not resolved the concern, other services available in the building should be utilized as necessary. These might include bilingual education, Title I services or personal attention from an available floating classroom aide. Chances of misplacing minority students are sharply reduced when avaliable resources are used exhaustively before looking for a handicapping condition.

An additional necessary step which is appropriate any time prior to asking for a formal assessment is to consult with a member of the child's linguistic/cultural group. This individual can differentiate between culturally normal behavior and behavior that is truly aberrant. For example, some Asian American children are extremely shy about speaking before a group. When called on to recite, they may stammer and show poorer articulation and language proficiency than they actually possess. Teachers unfamiliar with their cultural background may believe that the child has a communicative disorder and make a referral to a speech/language pathologist. Our present nationwide overrepresentation of Asian Americans in the communication disordered classification may be the result of cultural unawareness. At any rate, fewer instances of mistaking different cultural characteristics for handicaps will occur if consultations with minority group members take place.

Intelligence tests

Standardized tests, in general, are not useful for assessing the abilities of minority students. This is because minority children have usually had different learning experiences than the children the tests have been standardized on. The minority child may miss certain items because of a lack of exposure to their content not because of a lack of ability.

Minority language students who are more assimilated to the dominant culture do better on intelligence tests as a group than minority children from more traditional, and hence culturally different, families. This is not because they are more intelligent but because they are more familiar with the language and content of the tests. Children from less assimilated families have their abilities underestimated by an intelligence test score; this has been the most pervasive source of bias in assessment and placement.

Intelligence tests are problematic in other ways as well. A student's score is given meaning in comparison with a group of children the test was normed on. The score indicates how a student ranks against similar students of the same age. The comparison is usually a meaningless one for minority language children because their peers - children with the same linguistic/cultural background - were not included in the norming sample. The only solution to this problem is to create pluralistic, localized norms for every group that takes the test. Mercer (1979) has provided a rationale and method for this practice.

Translation of tests into a child's native language does not solve the problem of cultural bias. The frequency and difficulty of words vary

Overrepresentation in the mildly handicapped categories is not parelleled in other special education classifications. Assessors have no difficulty in identifying children who are blind, orthopedically impaired, or severely retarded, regardless of the child's culture. These conditions tend to occur with approximately the same frequency in all ethnic groups. Blindness is not only easier to identify than a learning disability but that identification leads to specific curricular adaptations (such as the use of braille, or lessons in orientation and mobility) that are clearly superior to the regular school program for meeting the educational needs of the child. Identification of a child as mildly retarded, learning disabled, or emotionally/behaviorally disabled, does not lead as easily to specific remediation.

An additional problem with the mild handicapped categories is that the distinctions between them are blurred. Students placed in one category can often qualify for one or both of the other two categories as well. Students who would have been labeled mildly retarded in the 1960's became learning disabled in the 1970's; students considered normal in one state may be identified as learning disabled in an adjoining state.

The mild categories have special problems of definition that make it easier for mistakes to be made. Given a situation in which the most widely used handicapped classifications and the most widely used tests to place children in those classifications have basic problems with validity, it is not surprising that placements of language minority language children in these categories are often unjustified. The additional variables introduced by children with differing degrees of language dominance and proficiency complicate the process beyond the abilities of present instruments to provide valid categorical conclusions. There is no easy answer to this systemic problem other than some basic changes in the way we look at children who are slow learners and without clearly defined handicaps. It is more useful to define these children's functional educational needs using criterion-referenced tests than to serve them on the basis of present classifications.

Conclusion

In the final analysis there can be no substitute for viewing a child from the perspective of his or her family and community. It is within the cultural group that behavior develops, and within the same context that its meaning can best be understood. Assessment is not a purely objective task, but one that proceeds according to the assumptions of those charged with this task. Past assumptions about the superiority of one group of people or one culture over another led to an assessment science that validated the assumptions on which it was built: minority differences became deficiencies.

Minority children have more in common with mainstream children than they have differences from them. But where differences do exist, the values of one group should not be used to judge the values of another. The assumptions of the assessor, whether pluralistic or ethnocentric, will determine how differences are interpreted. If this monograph aids teachers and administrators in examining their assumptions towards minority language children it will have served its purpose well.

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